



# Working time family measures

## What are working time family measures?

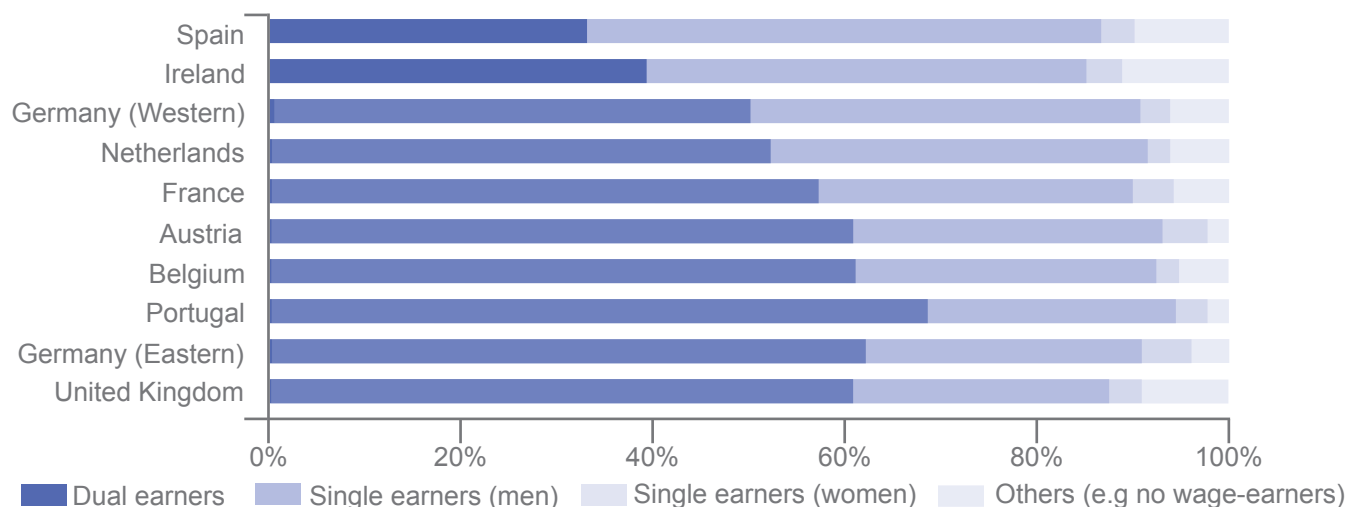
Working time family measures help make the workplace more responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities, whether for their children, their parents or others that require their care. Thus, these measures should contribute towards the reconciliation of work and family life, while at the same time increasing productivity and expanding equal opportunity. In many countries, the cornerstones of work-family arrangements have been laid by governmental social policy. These consist of extended, financially supported statutory parental leave arrangements with job security for the parent on leave, and a comprehensive system of public day care or support for private day care. Moreover, changes in the organization of work have also contributed to the development of working time measures which potentially help workers to better combine work and family life. These include:

- flexible working hours, such as staggered hours and flexitime (see Information Sheets Nos. WT-9 and WT-14);
- shorter working hours, such as part-time work (see Information Sheet No. WT-4);
- compressed, four-day working weeks (see Information Sheet No. WT-13);
- work-sharing and job-sharing (see Information Sheet No. WT-17);
- certain types of shift work (see Information Sheet No. WT-8); and
- individualized working hours, i.e. the possibility for workers to arrange their hours over the working week or even over a longer period. Such working time arrangements (e.g. “time banking”) enable workers to work a few hours a day less, when needed, as long as they catch up on these hours within a specified period of time (see Information Sheet No. WT-14).

## Why are these measures needed?

There are a number of reasons why working time family measures have gained increasing importance. First, in recent decades, there have been profound demographic changes, particularly the increasing entry of women into the paid labour market. The result has been a growing feminization of the labour force, and a related shift away from the “male breadwinner” household model, according to which the man works full time and the woman does not have paid employment (but instead takes care of household tasks, including caring for family members), towards dual-earner households. For example, among the European Union (EU) member States shown in the chart below, dual-earner households are the most common household type in all countries except Spain, Ireland and Western Germany. Despite women’s increasing participation in the paid labour force, however, many continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of the responsibilities for household work, including care-related tasks. For example, according to the Third European Survey on Working Conditions, only one-quarter of all men identified themselves as the person mainly responsible for housekeeping and shopping.<sup>1</sup> In fact, according to a recent study, women spend an average of nearly two hours more each day on household work and family care-related tasks than men in countries such as Estonia, France, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Thus, women in particular are facing increasing burdens in attempting to balance a greater load of paid work with their continuing domestic and family-related responsibilities.

Distribution of work among couples with children in selected EU countries (1996)



Source: Eurostat: Labour Force Survey, presented in G. Bosch: "Working time: Tendencies and emerging issues", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 138, No. 2, 1999, pp. 131-141.

In addition to the question of how work and family responsibilities are shared within households, there are also other concerns which reinforce the need for working time family measures. First, there is a general concern about protecting workers with family responsibilities from discrimination — a principle which is emphasized by the ILO's Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (see the discussion below). Second, there is also the reality of an aging population, particularly in many industrialized countries. This situation means that, for more and more households, family care responsibilities will involve not only caring for children, but also elder care as well.

The issue of combining work with personal life is often considered to be a concern only in the more developed countries. In fact, however, this issue directly concerns developing countries as well. For example, work-family time conflicts are an important cause of absenteeism, especially when families provide their own care, as in most of the developing world; absenteeism, in turn, has a negative impact on firms' productivity. Child labour provides another example of such time conflicts in developing countries, since it is well-known that children who are working generally have insufficient time to be able to obtain an education. Thus, measures that enable workers to reduce these sorts of time conflicts can be important in developing countries as well.

## How are working time family measures established in law?

With the Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981 (No. 156), the ILO acknowledged that workers who have responsibilities for their children or for other members of their immediate family who need their care should be protected against discrimination. According to this Convention, workers with family responses shall be guaranteed:

- the right to free choice of employment;
- consideration of their special needs concerning employment conditions and social security;

- assistance to enable them to enter, remain and re-enter the labour market.

National labour laws commonly focus on the protection of mothers (and sometimes fathers) immediately before and after childbirth. Such regulations are typically embedded in laws on maternity leave and parental leave, as well as night and weekend work. However, many "family-friendly" working time arrangements (e.g. flexitime) are provided at the enterprise level, even though they are not prescribed by legal regulations.

# Advantages and disadvantages

Various types of working time family measures can have a number of important advantages for both employer and employees.

## *Advantages for employers*

- Extend operating and opening hours.
- Match hours of labour more closely to variations in demand.
- Improve the retention of skilled women at work after a period of maternity leave.
- Reduce tardiness and absenteeism and thus help to increase productivity.
- Help recruit persons who could not work within standard working hours.
- Increase workers' motivation and productivity.

## *Advantages for employees*

- Allows working parents and others with family responsibilities to better combine work with family care and household tasks.
- Promotes gender equality, by helping women to obtain and retain paid work, allowing them to obtain work experience and promotion possibilities similar to other workers.
- Allows men to have more time for family, including care-related activities.
- Promotes the well-being of workers.

However, these types of family-friendly working time arrangements may also have some disadvantages for either employers, employees, or both.

## *Disadvantages for employers*

- Loss of direct supervision over working hours with some types of measures (e.g. flexitime, time banking).
- The increase in working hour flexibility might be accompanied by a greater complexity in scheduling work.
- Increased organizational expenditures may occur in some cases (e.g. job-sharing).

## *Disadvantages for employees*

- Irregular and unpredictable working hours. If working time arrangements are determined without consultation or negotiation with the staff concerned, the advantages for the employee might be overshadowed by disadvantages, such as poorer working conditions and restricted "time sovereignty" (control over working hours).
- Certain types of family-friendly working time arrangements (e.g. part-time work) are often associated with lower hourly wages, lower levels of benefits (e.g. pensions) and reduced lifetime earnings.
- Shift work may involve more unsocial hours, such as night and weekend work.

When determining how to make working time more "family-friendly", the following considerations are important to keep in mind:

- *Predictable* (but not necessarily standard) *hours of work*. Predictable hours are necessary in order to combine paid work with parental responsibilities or other caring responsibilities.



- *Adequate employment and social security.* Flexible working hours have to be combined with regular and reliable sources of income necessary for financial security and independence. Employment protection should be maintained, and protection against dismissal should be guaranteed. Family and tax policies also need to be adjusted to reflect the increased feminization of the workforce and the resulting dual-earner family structure.
- *Adequate care services.* Inadequate, costly public or private provision for childcare might limit or inhibit the effect of working time family measures. The establishment of childcare services within firms is a potentially important alternative.
- *School hours.* The operating hours of school systems need to be changed to better reflect the needs of dual-earner families.
- *Further training* should be provided to workers without regard for their working time arrangement.
- *Flexible leave arrangements.* In the case of parental leave, it is important to think of how both men and women can be supported to protect their own health and that of their child without putting their economic existence in jeopardy.
- An *entitlement right* for workers to get flexible working hours (length and distribution) and a *right to return to work* after family leave should be considered.
- *Consultation with workers.* It is essential to consult workers and their representatives when developing working time family measures.

## Case example

The Deutsche Bank employs 38,128 employees in Germany. Fifty-one per cent of these employees are women and have high levels of qualifications. With the objective of better meeting this need, the company has introduced the following working time family measures.

- *A wide range of part-time models.* In 1990, an agreement on part-time work was signed in the company. Women are entitled to reduce the number of their hours of work and to move back into full-time work when they no longer have childcare obligations.
- *Childcare services.* Different childcare services have been developed within the company. One of them is also directed by a local church group.
- *Unpaid extended parental leave.* This is six months' more than the statutory requirement.
- *Entitlement to re-employment.* Qualified women, who are likely to interrupt their unpaid parental leave (after statutory family leave), are entitled to return to work.
- *Training opportunities.* Women on parental leave are entitled to take part in further training initiatives of the bank in order to maintain their qualification levels.
- *Return programme.* The bank offers women an individual and flexible return programme for their reintegration into the company after their family leave. This takes the form of three to six months of on-the-job training in order to become qualified in technical knowledge and new products.

As a result of these family-friendly policies, 80 per cent of Deutsche Bank's female employees on family leave return to the company after finishing their leave, two-thirds of them on a part-time basis.

Source: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (ed.): *Best practices: vorbildhafte Unternehmensbeispiele zu Chancengleichheit in der Wirtschaft* (Berlin, 2000), pp. 37-39.

<sup>1</sup> P. Paoli and D. Merlié: *Third European Survey on Working Conditions 2000* (Dublin, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat: *Time use at different stages of life. Results from 13 European countries, July 2003* (Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2003).

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